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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001633

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA  
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK  
P FOR DRUSSEL AND RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN  
NSC FOR ABRAMS/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: FORMER LEBANESE AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S. ON  
THE LEBANESE POLITICAL SCENE

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Former Lebanese Ambassador to the U.S. Simon Karam discussed Lebanon's upcoming elections, political reforms, and Hizballah's role in both on November 11. Expressing resignation over the current majority's lack of unity, Karam said Hizballah would not tolerate election results not in its favor, and advocated stronger action on the Syrian border, even if that meant expanding the current UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mandate. End summary.

ELECTION OUTLOOK

2. (C) Ambassador Lincoln Bloomfield Jr., Special Envoy for MANPADS, and the Ambassador, accompanied by PM/WRA Sho Morimoto and PolMilOff, met former Ambassador to the U.S. Simon Karam at his residence on November 11. Karam, a Maronite Christian, focused on the Christians' inability to form a united coalition. Michel Aoun was losing Christian support, he said, but the March 14 majority had not been successful in demonstrating to disaffected Aoun voters that there is an alternative. When asked about the viability of a more centrist bloc of independents, Karam agreed that it was "doable in the short term," suggesting the U.S. support such an effort. All agreed the desired outcome of a potential third bloc would be to weaken the March 8 opposition. However, Karam did not believe Hizballah would allow the elections to go against it, adding, "they will revert to arms as they did in May."

3. (C) Karam noted that electoral compromise and change comes incrementally in Lebanon. There have been several attempts by political blocs to negotiate parliamentary seats, he said, citing Beirut's second district, where March 14 and the opposition agreed at Doha to divide the four seats among themselves. Karam added that in the western Bekaa district, where six seats are divided among five confessional communities (two Sunni, one Shia, one Druze, and two Christian), there is an effort by Hizballah to secure a seat. He warned that a seat going to Hizballah would give it a foothold where none was previously, and would allow it to foster development of communication lines between its stronghold in the south and supporters in the northern Bekaa.

SECURITY POLICY PART OF  
OVERALL POLITICAL REFORM  
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14. (C) Karam, speaking on political reform, said the "system is locked." There needed to be a security plan for the country that incorporated Hizballah's militia into the national defense forces, he said. Local communities in south Lebanon trusted Hizballah because it knows the local population and had performed well during the 2006 war with Israel. Karam claimed Hizballah, since the end of the 2006 war, had been able to prevail "internally" i.e., politically, and that the UNIFIL mission in the south had provided Hizballah cover so that it could allocate more effort to its political strategies. Karam expressed comments from acquaintances in the south who complained that the March 14 majority missed opportunities to capitalize on international support after the departure of the Syrian armed forces and the 2006 war. He said the majority feared antagonizing Hizballah, but Hizballah had no reciprocal fear. The majority lost the momentum of 2005 and now risks losing its parliamentary majority.

15. (C) Hizballah realized it had gone too far in the 2006 war, Karam noted, but the unsecured border with Syria gave Hizballah room to operate. He believed border security must be addressed with strong action even if it meant expanding UNIFIL's mandate. He suggested that Japan could be a potential contributor to an expanded UNIFIL mandate, with specific responsibility for supporting security on the Syrian border.

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